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STRENGTHENING AND IMPROVING INTERGOVERNMENTAL PROGRAMMING EXERCISES FOR TECHNICAL COOPERATION AMONG DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Report of the Administrator

SUMMARY

Pursuant to decision 6/5 of the High-level Committee on the Review of Technical Co-operation among Developing Countries, the present report describes the progress made in the 1989-1990 biennium in strengthening and improving intergovernmental TCDC programming exercises.

It reviews the objectives and methods deployed in organizing past exercises and describes some of the lessons learned in the process. The Committee's attention is drawn to paragraphs 19 to 24, which contain the Administrator's preliminary conclusions pending the outcome of a two-phased in-depth evaluation of the exercises currently being undertaken by the Special Unit for TCDC.

INTRODUCTION

1. In its decision 6/5 the High-level Committee recalled General Assembly resolution 42/179 of 11 December 1987 on strengthening and improving intergovernmental programming exercises for technical cooperation among developing countries, and stressed the need for these exercises to facilitate the integration of TCDC into the mainstream of technical cooperation activities, specially those of the United Nations system and particularly of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

2. Pending a two-phased in-depth evaluation of the intergovernmental TCDC programming exercises which the Special Unit for TCDC is currently undertaking, this interim report, prepared on the basis of information provided by Governments of developing countries which have participated in such exercises, analyses and appraises past experience and offers some preliminary conclusions for future direction of these exercises.

I. PROMOTION OF TCDC MODALITIES

3. Intergovernmental TCDC programming exercises are intended to promote the use of TCDC modalities between interested developing countries in urgent problem-solving activities and in mutual exchange of know-how among those countries. An intergovernmental programming exercise consists of a preparatory period of at least eight months culminating in a meeting held in the host country at which the participating developing countries finalize agreements on the TCDC activities that are planned to be implemented through exchanges of experts, consultants, training, etc. It thus promotes TCDC interaction among institutions and organizations of the developing countries in both the public and private sectors.

4. The preparatory work on these exercises consists of five phases. Phase 1 entails discussions with a host country leading to the identification in that country of a coordinating organization and the setting up of a national coordinating committee consisting of representatives of interested ministries, departments and other governmental or private sector organizations. Local representatives of the relevant specialized agencies and the office of the resident representative participate in the work of the committee. The national coordinating committee identifies other developing countries to be invited to participate in the exercise, and develops a capacities/needs questionnaire to be completed by all participating institutions of the participating countries. UNDP and the relevant specialized agencies assist in finalizing the questionnaires. A duration of one and a half months is estimated for phase 1. Phase 2, with a planned duration of two months, involves the completion of capacities/needs questionnaire by the participating organizations in the host country and in all invited countries. Field personnel of the specialized agencies concerned assist in the completion of the questionnaires.

5. In phase 3, the questionnaires are forwarded through the respective resident representatives of UNDP to the national coordinating organization of the host country where a consolidated compendium of capacities/needs is prepared. The Special Unit reproduces the compendium and forwards copies to the participating Governments through the UNDP offices. The Governments distribute the compendium to all those institutions which have completed the questionnaires and the process of matching their needs with capacities offered by other countries, and vice versa, begins. Consultant missions sometimes assist in the matching process. Again, field personnel of the specialized agencies, and of UNDP, assist in the capacities/needs matching process.

6. At the end of phase 3, a provisional list of TCDC opportunities for capacities/needs matching should emerge. In phase 4, the provisional list is jointly reviewed by the host organization and the Special Unit for TCDC and the United Nations specialized agency concerned (in cases of unisectoral exercises). This takes about two to three days, normally one month from the end of phase 3. The bilateral consultations meeting, phase 5, is attended by two representatives (one from the respective government coordinating authority, the other from the relevant sector) from each participating country to obtain agreement on the technical cooperation proposals emerging from the exercise. The participants are assisted by representatives of the competent specialized agencies and by UNDP staff in their bilateral consultations. The meeting has a duration of five working days.

7. The implementation of the agreements concluded in the fifth phase remains the responsibility of the parties involved. Financial support for the intergovernmental programming exercise is provided by the Special Unit from the SPR allocation for TCDC. These financial resources have been provided from the umbrella project INT/83/904 Promotion of Action-oriented TCDC Activities, which, having developed piecemeal, had a total earmarking of $7,354,875 from 1983 until 1990. The amount budgeted for intergovernmental programming exercises totalled approximately $1.65 million for 20 exercises. This type of exercise has represented an important mechanism available to the Special Unit for TCDC to promote the use of TCDC modalities among developing countries.

II. EXPERIENCE IN THE USE OF PROGRAMMING EXERCISES

8. The intergovernmental programming exercises held so far have numbered 20 since the inception of the use of this mechanism in 1983 in China. As reported to the High-level Committee at its previous session, a total of 12 had been undertaken until the end of 1988. In the biennium 1989-1990 an additional eight were held. The rate of implementation started at four exercises for 1983-1986 and increased to eight for each succeeding biennium 1987-1988 and 1989-1990. Summary data on each of the exercises held is provided in the annex below.

9. The result of the experience by region shows that Latin America is making the greatest use of the mechanism with 10 exercises held, 4 during the

1989-1990 biennium, while Asia had 5 exercises, with 2 during the 1989-1990 biennium. The Arab States had 3 exercises, but none have been held during the 1989-1990 biennium, and Africa had the first 2 exercises during this biennium. The exercises held can be divided into two distinct groups: one related to rounds of programming of a multisectoral character carried out by national focal points for TCDC of each country where the negotiations are associated with other intergovernmental meetings. The other group concentrates on the exercise itself. There have been a total of five exercises of the first type, all in Latin America in conjunction with annual meetings of SELA (Sistema Económico Latino Americano).

10. The programming exercises of the second type number 15, of which 6 have been carried out in the last biennium in Mexico, Argentina, the United Republic of Tanzania, Ghana, Indonesia and India. The countries which hosted programming exercises before the last biennium include Pakistan, Egypt, Central American subregion (Nicaragua), Peru, Tunisia, Turkey and China. The duration of the preparatory period for the programming exercises ranges from 9 to 18 months. The contribution of the Special Unit for TCDC for each of these exercises has ranged from $85,000 to $120,000. These costs are related mostly to the hiring of national consultants, and travel and hotel expenses of other than the host country participants to the bilateral consultation meetings. All other costs are normally borne by the host countries.

11. The purpose of the programming exercises is to bring together interested parties to discuss specific development problems that would lend themselves to the use of TCDC modalities for implementation. In doing so, the exercises required the identification of capacities in one country that would be matched to needs in another. The matching was done during the preparatory period with the aim of finalizing agreements between the two parties at the final bilateral consultations meeting. The number of agreements reached total 2,510. In the biennium 1989-1990 there were 979 agreements. These agreements are meant to be implemented on a TCDC basis.

III. APPRAISAL OF THE EXPERIENCE

12. The result of the programming exercises are agreements between suppliers and users of services which lend themselves to a TCDC modality. The follow-up actions have been/are considered to be the exclusive responsibility of the contracting parties. Information on the follow-up of all the agreements has been difficult to obtain as Governments have not always informed UNDP of the follow-up actions. A questionnaire sent to all Governments which had participated in past exercises, requesting <u>inter alia</u> this type of information, attracted 16 replies, few among them providing meaningful or comprehensive details. In many instances, there is information that the implementation of the agreement has become overdue and after some time perhaps may no longer remain feasible. Various reasons for this are being cited: lack of administrative support from the national focal points, lack of the required financial support and, in some cases, insufficiently clear definition of the needs in a manner that would lend itself for further action.

13. Experience has also shown that government requests for programming exercises have arisen more from their own capacity and desire to supply services to other countries. The result has been programming approaches of a multisectoral nature. The multisectoral approach makes it difficult to define needs explicitly. Therefore, needs have been expressed in terms of narrow activities or alternatively as supply of specific inputs in terms of an expert, consultant or a training opportunity. As such, these activities have not, in most instances, been expressed in terms of major projects even though the catalytic short-term exchange of expertise may eventually assist in the design of a major project.

14. Experience thus far has revealed that these exercises prove more fruitful when they are organized on the basis of needs to which available capacities are to be matched, and also if they focus on one sector or subsector. An example of this orientation is the programming exercise for the United Republic of Tanzania, which was more driven by the needs of the host country. In the 1989-1990 biennium, three of the six programming exercises were sectoral in character: the exercise among Latin American countries held in Mexico dealing with aquaculture; a similar one held in Argentina with focus on maritime activities; and the one in India with concentration on cooperatives. This focused approach has a greater opportunity to lead to the implementation of major projects.

15. There are two examples of this more narrow specialized sector approach which are indicative of the improvements of the programme exercises. Pakistan held a programming exercise on science and industry in September 1988 which focused on professional and private organizations. It was the first sectoral exercise held. It was limited to industrial and scientific organizations located in the city of Karachi, the largest industrial centre of the country. There were 148 agreements made, 138 agreements between Pakistan and 29 other developing countries and 10 between the invited countries. Agreements were more easily negotiated because participants spoke familiar technical language leading to better prospects for implementation. In Latin America, a unisectoral exercise was held on aquaculture in Mexico in June 1989. There were 21 countries that prepared 400 proposals which finished with 110 agreements: 14 training courses responding to 200 requests for learning, 52 interchanges of experts and 11 major projects. The Latin American Development Bank has indicated its disposition to finance a package of these projects with an approximately $1.5 million contribution.

16. However, the preparatory period for the programming exercise for the sectoral approach is more extensive in character in that it entails the preparation of capacities/needs compendia not only from the host country but also from all participating countries. The matching process is more complex. The duration of the preparatory period remains more or less the same. The start of the implementation of potential projects emerging from these exercises generally takes from 3 to 12 months. A regional or interregional project may take two years not counting from external sources the time required to search for financial support if needed. The overall implementation rate of the agreements reached at the programming exercises is

not fully known, but a rough estimate ranges from less than 5 per cent to 50 per cent among the different participating countries.

17. The programming exercises associated with other intergovernmental meetings essentially represent five meetings held in Latin America with SELA. These exercises have generated on the average approximately 50 agreements, compared to an average of approximately 170, ranging from a minimum of 30 to a maximum of 324 agreements in exercises solely dedicated to TCDC. However, the meetings of SELA have had an important effect at the ministerial and administrative level on fostering the utilization of TCDC modalities as an instrument of development and foreign policy. TCDC modalities have become significant instruments in the process of concertation, negotiation and management in the solution of problems in priority areas. Some of the important decisions taken by SELA at its highest political level are on strengthening priority areas and national TCDC focal points; defining TCDC opportunities to promote training, exchange of expertise and joint projects; identifying and resolving obstacles to the use of TCDC modalities, formulation of information networks on TCDC and coordination of organizations on specific TCDC programming. These types of programming exercises enhance the opportunities for mainstreaming TCDC in the overall context of countries' development activities. They also make use of, and strengthen, the Information Referral System of the Special Unit for TCDC, INRES-South, in a more purposeful way. This experience suggests that similar initiatives might prove useful in other regions as a prerequisite for the fostering of more focused sectoral programming exercises.

18. As stated in paragraph 2, the Special Unit for TCDC is undertaking a two-phased in-depth evaluation of the use of the intergovernmental programming exercises which is particularly oriented towards improving on the time necessary to prepare for the bilateral consultations meetings, while more importantly establishing in a more organized manner, the effectiveness of the mechanism in using TCDC modalities in the implementation of development projects of priority importance to developing countries. The first phase will evaluate programming exercises carried out before the end of 1990, while the second phase will cover those undertaken in 1991. This evaluation is also expected to refine the observations made in order to bring these programming activities closer to those supported by the United Nations development system and particularly UNDP in order appropriately to mainstream TCDC as called for by the High-level Committee.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

19. TCDC programming exercises have played a role in promoting the use of TCDC modalities for the implementation of development projects. However, the full extent of follow-up activities is not known. Exercises, undertaken in conjunction with regional meetings of national focal points have also provided the forum for considering the possibilities for mainstreaming TCDC in national and regional development programmes. There is a growing need for external

financial resources to facilitate timely implementation of the technical cooperation activities agreed to in these exercises.

20. It is advisable also to draw attention to the need for Governments to establish through the national TCDC focal points appropriate systems of follow-up on agreements reached at programming exercises to be complemented by UNDP's stepped-up capacity to monitor, report and evaluate the effectiveness of the effort.

21. The national focal points for TCDC need to be strengthened, wherever required, so that they can better discharge the responsibilities of integrating TCDC modalities in the country's overall development plans and thus permit the mainstreaming of these activities in the United Nations development system and more particularly with the UNDP programming practices. For this purpose, each region may need to develop periodic meetings of focal points associated with other intergovernmental meetings, an example of which is SELA in Latin America.

22. From available reactions, it is evident that there is government interest to continue the use of this mechanism at approximately the same level as has been carried out in the past but with a preference for reorienting them to sectoral programming exercises.

23. The results of the in-depth evaluation currently in progress will be used, together with these general conclusions, as a means to formulate a future strategy for programming exercises. In the evaluation, the duration of the preparatory period for a programming exercise will be examined, as well as the time required for the follow-up actions resulting from agreements reached, with a view to seeing whether both could be reasonably shortened.

Annex

SUMMARY DATA